

What Ukraine's Jews Fear

Opinion

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By EDUARD DOLINSKY in The New York Times, April 11, 2017 KYIV, Ukraine — Last September, I stood at the 75th-anniversary commemorations at Babi Yar — a mass grave where more than 33,000 Jews from Kyiv were massacred in two days during the Holocaust — listening to President Petro Poroshenko deliver a stirring speech about why such atrocities must never be repeated. As the director for the past 10 years of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, one of the country's most influential Jewish organizations, I was pleased to hear this. But my joy was tempered by something I'd seen at Babi Yar earlier in the day an exhibit honoring Ivan Rohach. Rohach was the editor of a radical nationalist newspaper that in 1941, the same year as the massacre at Babi Yar, described Jews as the "greatest enemy of the people." He was also a leading activist with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, whose members were actively involved in the Holocaust in Ukraine. The exhibit omitted all of this. The O.U.N. and its military wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, or U.P.A., are now being glorified as freedom fighters. What is not mentioned is the O.U.N.'s xenophobic, anti-Semitic ideology, which described Jews as a "predominantly hostile body within our national organism," or that the O.U.N.-U.P.A. militia collaborated in the Holocaust and also massacred between 70,000 and 100,000 Polish civilians in order to create an ethnically pure Ukraine. Despite these atrocities, many Ukrainians, especially in western Ukraine, view the O.U.N.-U.P.A. as heroes because they fought a guerrilla war against the Soviets during the 1950s, a struggle that some believe has echoes in the fight against Russia today. Government-sponsored institutions are behind the whitewashing. Led by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, the rewriting of the country's World War II history is being done to glorify the O.U.N.-U.P.A. while denying the group's crimes. In 2015, Ukraine adopted a law that classifies the O.U.N.-U.P.A. as "fighters for Ukrainian statehood" and that says those who "publicly exhibit a disrespectful attitude" toward these groups will be prosecuted. Since 2015, numerous streets have been renamed after O.U.N.-U.P.A. leaders and members. The memory institute is currently drafting a law to retroactively exonerate individual members of the O.U.N.-U.P.A. who had been convicted of murdering Jews and Poles by Soviets after the war. This is not just a fight over history. Virulent right-wing nationalist groups have found new prominence in Ukrainian politics in recent years. Although extremist political parties make up only a small minority of Parliament, far-right groups have violently clashed with the government on a number of occasions. Many Jews fear that the government will never repudiate the cult of the O.U.N.-U.P.A. for fear of provoking a far-right backlash. For complete text of the commentary above, link below: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/11/opi...t-ukraines-jews-fear.html>